United Nations E/2010/SR.20

Economic and Social Council

Provisional

29 September 2010

Original: English

Substantive session of 2010

Provisional summary record of the 20th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 2 July 2010, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. Ali (Malaysia)

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Gender equality and empowerment of women in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals: regional perspectives

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Regional cooperation:

Gender equality and empowerment of women in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals: regional perspectives (E/2010/15, E/2010/15/Add.11, E/2010/16, E/2010/17, E/2010/18, E/2010/19 and E/2010/20)

1. **The President** invited Mr. Ján Kubiš, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Europe and current Coordinator of the Regional Commissions, to act as moderator for the dialogue with the Executive Secretaries.

2. **Mr. Kubiš** (Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)), moderator, said that the current dialogue was taking place just as a meeting of the General Assembly was about to adopt a resolution establishing the new United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, to be known as UN Women. The theme of the dialogue was also pertinent to the ongoing preparations for the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals, to be held in September, at which the linkage between the MDGs and gender equality and women's empowerment would be discussed in depth. Moreover, General Assembly resolution 64/184 had invited the regional commissions to provide input to the preparatory process and to participate in the High-level Plenary Meeting. The regional commissions were already holding regional consultations and would also organize a side event during the High-level Plenary Meeting.

3. The impact of the global economic and financial crisis and the persistent volatility of commodity prices made sustained economic growth and development a greater challenge in most developing countries and some of the positive trends in MDG achievement were being reversed. The food and fuel crises before it had also had an impact, especially in respect of MDG targets relating to poverty and hunger. Achievements were uneven across countries and regions, with progress being made towards some goals and related indicators while others were lagging behind. Within countries, there were striking disparities between rural and urban areas and different population groups. It was alarming that some goals and indicators relating to the status of women were among those on which the least progress had been achieved. The maternal health situation was particularly serious, with half a million women dying every year from pregnancy-related causes and 85 per cent of those deaths occurring in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia. Women also accounted for 70 per cent of the world's poor.

4. **Mr. Janneh** (Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)), accompanying his presentation with computerized slides, said that poverty remained endemic in countries which had not made demonstrable progress in bridging the gaps between men and women in their capacities as actors and beneficiaries of development. National development plans and strategies should recognize and address the gender dimensions of poverty, including skewed access to productive resources.

5. Target 1 of Goal 1 called for halving the number of people living on less than one dollar a day. Currently, 35 countries in Africa (69 per cent) had poverty reduction strategy papers and many of them were engaged in MDG-based planning and costing in line with the 2005 World Summit agenda. Only 16.7 per cent of countries were on course to achieve the target and 33.3 percent were likely to achieve it, while 43.3 percent were unlikely and just under 7 per cent very unlikely to meet it. Poverty in Africa was substantially higher among women, children and young people.

6. Target 2 was to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all. Women and youth accounted for the majority of the unemployed and between 2008 and 2009, unemployment had risen from 8.8 per cent to 11.6 per cent in the region. The employment-to-population ratio was generally higher for men.

7. Target 3 was to halve the proportion of people suffering from hunger. In sub-Saharan Africa, from 33 per cent to 35 per cent of the population was malnourished, with over 70 per cent of the food-insecure population living in rural areas. An estimated one sixth of children died before reaching the age of five years.

8. Goal 2, the achievement of universal primary education, was one of Africa's success stories, as many countries had instituted free, compulsory and universal primary education and some had already achieved parity. Nevertheless, issues of retention and

progression, quality and safety for girls remained key issues. In a few countries, the lower rates of male enrolment were a cause of concern.

9. Turning to Goal 3 on promoting gender equality and the empowerment women, he said that the indicators emphasized education, opportunities for economic participation and political involvement. Eleven countries had achieved parity in secondary education while another five had a gender parity index (GPI) of over 0.90. Eight countries had achieved parity in tertiary education, while most countries had a GPI below 0.50. Eight countries had achieved parity in adult literacy.

10. Data on women's employment in the non-agricultural sector were scarce. Women accounted on average for 25 per cent of public employees, mainly occupying lower-level jobs, and only 8 per cent in the security forces. They predominated in the informal sector.

11. Member countries of the Southern African Development Community and East African Community had made enormous strides towards the 30 per cent target for women's representation in Parliament. In the broader context, there was a lack of equality at the local level in executive, judicial and traditional decision-making.

12. With regard to Goal 4 on reducing child mortality, he said that the health status of children both affected women's productivity and reflected their level of education and ability to afford appropriate medical treatment. The average under-five mortality rate in the region was 166 per 1,000 live births and the worst-performing countries were in Southern and Eastern Africa. Seventeen of the 20 countries with the highest infant mortality rates were in Africa, 7 of them in West Africa.

13. In relation to Goal 5 on improving maternal health, he said that maternal mortality rates remained high, with rates ranging from 840 to 1,000 per 100,000 live births. It was unlikely that many countries would achieve the targets for reducing maternal mortality and providing access to reproductive health services. Unsafe abortions and female genital mutilation were major contributors to maternal mortality. Goals 4 and 5 would be the theme of the African Union Summit to be held in Kampala, Uganda, at the end of July.

14. With regard to Goal 6 on combating HIV/AIDS malaria and other diseases, he noted that women an girls were more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS due t cultural factors and their traditional subordination t men. They were also affected as caregivers and th time spent providing care was not recognized i national income statistics. The HIV/AIDS prevalenc rate among female adults was highest in Souther Africa and lowest in North Africa. Several North an West African countries had maintained comparativel low adult female prevalence rates of 3 per cent o lower. Malaria was the number one cause of morbidit and mortality in most African countries. Althoug insecticide-treated nets had brought some progress, th overall proportion of under-fives treated wit appropriate drugs remained a cause for concern.

15. Turning to Goal 7 on ensuring environmenta sustainability, he said that women and girls were ke actors in household sanitation, water and firewoo collection and food crop farming. The 2010 Africa Development Forum would focus on the issue o climate change, which was not gender-neutral in it impact on rural livelihoods, as it deepened an widened existing gender inequalities in the context o increased water stress and water-related conflict. Th direct impacts included the need for women and girl to walk longer distances to search for water and car for the sick.

16. As for Goal 8 on developing a global partnershi for development, ongoing global processes, whethe North-South or South-South, should pay close attention to gender equality and women' empowerment. According to a recent ECA publicatio on intra-African trade, women's participation in trad was hampered by limitations arising both from thei productive and reproductive roles. The next issue o the *African Women's Report* would be devoted t financing for gender equality in Africa. While externa resource mobilization was essential, it was also important to ensure that domestic resources were allocated to that area. Some countries had launched gender-budgeting initiatives at the national and sectora levels.

17. ECA recommended rigorous accountability on gender issues through commitment to the collection o data disaggregated by sex and to gender mainstreaming in policy design, budgeting, implementation and monitoring. Incentives should be offered to countries making progress with gender equality in the context o

the MDGs. Research was needed on the impact of climate change in all sectors, with emphasis on food security, health, education and migration within the context of gender relations. Gender-responsive budgeting was not only good practice but a legal and moral imperative. It was also important to assess the impact of the persistent brain drain on African health systems.

18. **Ms. Heyzer** (Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)) said that a critical turning point in global development had been reached. Although the Asia and the Pacific region had managed to halve absolute poverty through economic growth, the global economic crisis, following on the heels of the food and fuel crises, was threatening to reverse many of the past decade's hard-won gains. Economic recovery was essential for making real progress towards achieving the MDGs and was only possible with dramatic improvements in gender equality and women's empowerment.

19. The role of Asia and the Pacific in wider global progress towards the MDGs and economic recovery was severely constrained by the costs of gender inequality across the region. Yet the region's economic growth and dynamism were vital to global economic stability and growth as the region was already playing a key role in helping to lead the world out of crisis.

20. Prior to the crisis, the region had been on track towards halving the proportion of the population living below the poverty line. It had made early progress in reducing gender disparities in primary education, in reducing the consumption of ozone-depleting substances, reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS and in increasing access to safe drinking water. However, the crisis had delayed and even reversed some of that progress. In 2009 and 2010, the crisis had trapped an additional 21 million people in extreme poverty. Across the region, an additional 40 million had lost income or food security, with a major impact on progress towards MDGs relating to education and health.

21. Women were disproportionately carrying the burden of those shocks, including the 60 per cent of women in the region who were employed in the informal sector. In South Asia, that proportion was over 80 per cent. Women also carried the burden of social care. If the experience of the 1997 Asian crisis was any indication, there would be a second round of impacts as the loss of women's income affected access to health and education.

22. The economic cost of gender disparities and gaps was being increasingly recognized but progress in addressing them was insufficient. Reducing maternal mortality rates in the region was one of the greatest challenges, with 250,000 mothers dying annually in childbirth or from pregnancy-related complications. Such deaths resulted in a combined $15 million loss in productivity each year in the developing world as a whole.

23. Despite real progress towards universal primary education, gender inequality in education meant that the region still sustained an estimated loss of from $16 billion to $30 billion per year owing to reduced labour productivity and other factors. Women's lack of participation in the formal sector also cost the region billions of dollars every year. Increasing women's employment rates to 70 per cent would increase GDP by from 2 per cent to 4 per cent annually.

24. Prioritization of gender equality and women's empowerment would help to reclaim lost progress towards achievement of the MDGs and economic recovery. The outcomes of the midterm review of the Beijing Platform for Action and the creation of the new gender entity within the United Nations system provided further momentum.

25. Gender equality and empowerment of women were smart economics. Investing in women and girls had a powerful multiplier effect in areas such as productivity, efficiency and economic growth. The same arguments held for social investment in women. Progress in preventing unwanted pregnancies would improve the education of girls and increase employment opportunities for women. Better educated women were healthier, had fewer and healthier children and had higher future earnings.

26. Women's empowerment had to be at the centre of the political and economic decision-making agenda in order to ensure real change. Women in the Asia and Pacific region held fewer seats in parliament than anywhere else in the world except in the Middle East, and four countries had no women lawmakers. Policies and measures were needed to ensure greater participation by women and transparent and fair selection and promotion processes. Parliamentary quotas could help to overcome the imbalance.

27. Gender equality was not solely a women's issue and men were required as partners. Both female and male leadership role models were needed to break down the cultural barriers that undermined the participation and confidence of girls and women.

28. Gender responsiveness in crisis response policies and measures was an immediate priority. Stimulus packages should have a stronger explicit focus on the MDGs, as the 1997 crisis had shown that social recovery took twice as long as economic recovery. The large public works initiated by Governments in the region had mainly created construction jobs for men. Increased investment in social services would provide opportunities for women.

29. The second immediate priority was to engender social protection policies and programmes. Social protection would be the theme of the annual session of ESCAP in 2011. Across the region, only 20 per cent of the unemployed and underemployed had access to labour market programmes and only 30 per cent of older people received pensions. Social protection systems should explicitly address women's life cycle and work-related risks and should be part of long-term investment in inclusive development, with gender equality and women's empowerment as a core driver.

30. The MDGs in themselves were insufficient to transform deeply entrenched gender inequalities. Efforts in all areas should be linked to the wider commitments of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action and Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

31. It was time to move forward and take advantage of the opportunities created by the current challenges. If the international community could maximize the synergies between the MDGs and economic recovery using the powerful multiplier effect of gender equality and women's empowerment, it would re-energize the global development agenda and contribute to the building of a more just society for all.

32. **Mr. Kubiš** (Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)), moderator, recalled that MDG regional assessments could be found not only on the websites of regional commissions but also on the regional commissions' joint website. The regional commissions were already engaged in regional consultations to prepare for the High-level Plenary Meeting. A few weeks previously, a major regional forum on the MDGs had been held in Istanbul, Turkey, and an inter-agency report on the MDGs was being finalized.

33. Speaking on behalf of ECE, he said that he would share some findings from the region's midterm review of the Beijing Platform for Action. Educational parity had almost been achieved in the region but Member States should think beyond Goal 3 as there was still a long way to go in implementing the more far-reaching provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the 12 areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action.

34. Gender role stereotypes continued to reproduce entrenched inequalities between men and women and gender gaps were persistently high as women shouldered the bulk of unpaid domestic and care work, with repercussions on their economic independence, life-long earnings and social security. Underrepresented in power and decision-making in all countries of the region, women rarely accounted for more than a third of members of parliament. They held less than a third of managerial positions and accounted for only a quarter of employees. They were overrepresented in low-paid and unpaid work, and gender wage gaps were remarkably resilient.

35. Efforts to combat violence against women were of key relevance to achieving the MDGs. Greater attention should be given to gender dimensions in national poverty reduction and development strategies related to the MDGs. Gender equality, still predominantly seen as a social issue, was not yet sufficiently integrated into economic policymaking. There was a need to strengthen the national mechanisms for gender equality, identifying and addressing the problems they faced and strengthening their capacity for mainstreaming the gender perspective across all policy areas.

36. Effective enforcement of existing legislation, especially in the area of violence against women, remained a key challenge. A broad support base was needed across all levels of government and the judiciary, with the active involvement of civil society. Systematic monitoring, evaluation and accountability were also required, underpinned by evidence-based data collection. Sex-disaggregated statistics were needed so that gender gaps could be measured and policy measures taken to close them. ECE had recently completed a Manual on Developing Gender Statistics.

as part of its efforts to assist member States in obtaining better information on gender equality.

37. Intensified policy efforts were needed to achieve the MDGs and ECE member countries were contributing through financial assistance and bilateral development cooperation. The Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development had reported an increase in development aid in 2009 despite the financial crisis. In 2007/2008, only one fifth of development assistance had been spent on activities with a gender dimension, and less than 3 per cent on activities with an explicit gender equality objective. Regional cooperation, with assistance from the regional commissions, was very important for promoting gender equality and empowerment of women.

38. **Mr. Prado** (Deputy Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)), accompanying his presentation with computerized slides, said that the eradication of extreme poverty was impossible without parallel progress in health, education and gender equality. The statistics showed that women did not have the same level of employment participation or capacity to have their own income. In both urban and rural areas, there were always more women than men without their own income, regardless of age. Women's average share of wage employment in the non-agricultural sector had been rising in the region but very slowly, from 40 per cent in 1990 to 43 per cent in 2007. In some countries it was growing faster, but the gaps persisted.

39. Women's participation in non-agricultural wage employment had grown more in the Caribbean countries than in other areas of the region. Yet there were still many women without their own economic resources. In 1994, 42.8 per cent of women in Latin America had had no income of their own; that figure was currently 31.6 per cent.

40. When women did participate in the labour market, their employment was mostly precarious. In most countries of the region (except in the Dominican Republic and Honduras), women were concentrated mainly in low-productivity jobs, which affected their income, job quality and social security protection. Wage gaps were closing but still existed.

41. As for parity in education, it had already been achieved at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. It was important to improve women's wages and the quality of their employment.

42. The regional average for parliamentary participation was almost the same as the world average: 19 per cent in 2009 for Latin America and a higher percentage in the Caribbean. It was still far from parity and participation was very low in some countries. In the past five years, however, five female Presidents had been elected in the region and many other presidential elections had included women candidates.

43. The eleventh session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean had been held from 13 to 16 July in Brasilia, Brazil, on the theme of "What kind of State? What kind of equality?". The main proposals for discussion had been reform of the links between the basic institutions of society through public policies; the necessary steps to eliminate gender biases in the labour market and overcome the wage gap, segmentation and discrimination; guaranteeing women's rights in the labour market and within the family to promote their economic and physical empowerment and empowerment in all decision-making spheres; and the building of a solid institutional framework with the appropriate regulatory capacity.

44. **Ms. Omer** (Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)), Chief of the Commission's Centre for Women, said that Arab and Western Asian countries' efforts to achieve gender equality and empower women had yielded results as diverse as those countries themselves. Among the factors affecting their attainment of the Millennium Development Goals were their vastly different economic capacities, past and present conflicts and, in some cases, political instabilities.

45. With regard to Goal 1 on eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, she noted that discriminatory legislation and wage practices, lack of access to resources and cultural barriers in the region were to blame for women's relatively low participation in the labour force — 22 per cent, compared to the world average of 56 per cent. (Non-agricultural wage employment ranged from 11.5 per cent in Bahrain to 22.3 per cent in Morocco, compared to 39 per cent globally.) Young women, in particular, had been hard hit by the after-effects of the 2008 global financial crisis. Although women now had greater access to

higher education, they continued to opt for careers in health and education, extensions of their domestic roles of caring for others. Women must be encouraged to pursue non-traditional careers in the sciences and technology in order to correct the mismatch between their academic training and market demands.

46. It was also crucial to ensure women's right to decent working conditions, including equal pay for equal work; to amend discriminatory tax, social security and pension legislation; and to lift restrictions on women's freedom of movement. Because very few women were members of trade unions and other labour institutions, women were often unaware of their labour rights. Some Arab countries, particularly least developed countries, lacked the necessary infrastructure — such as transportation and day-care facilities for young children — to enable women to enter the labour force.

47. Nonetheless, a number of well-educated women had become successful entrepreneurs running their own businesses, and most Arab countries had signed ILO conventions. Some had recently enacted new labour laws to improve women's access to the labour force and their conditions of work. Lebanon, for example, had abolished restrictions on night work for women in 2000, and in 2004, Morocco had reformed legislation on maternity rights.

48. The Arab region had been very successful in achieving gender parity in education. Some Arab countries had closed the gender gap in primary education enrolment and others, including Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Kuwait and Bahrain, were very close to doing so. Since 1990, youth literacy rates in the region had been climbing as a result of increased school enrolment and primary education survival rates. In the least developed countries, however, enrolment rates for girls (48 per cent) lagged behind that of boys (approximately 60 per cent).

49. Gender disparity was accentuated at higher levels of education, largely because of poverty and also because of distances between school and home, lack of proper sanitary facilities, and, in Iraq and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, lack of security. In rural areas, particularly in least developed countries, girls were needed for household or farm labour, or dropped out of school to marry at an early age.

50. The proportion of women in managerial and decision-making positions in finance-related fields was rising. Since the 1990s, a woman had been appointed Minister of Trade and Industry in Jordan and Minister of Economy and International Cooperation in Egypt. More recently, the United Arab Emirates had appointed its first female Minister for Economic Affairs. The representation of women in national parliaments in the Arab region, however, was the lowest in the world, and far from the 30 per cent recommended in the Beijing Platform for Action. To remedy that situation, Jordan, Tunisia, Sudan, Iraq, Palestine, Morocco and Mauritania had adopted temporary special measures, such as quota systems, resulting in an increase in the number of women in parliaments and on local councils. As a result, by February 2010, female representation in the Iraqi Parliament had been 25 per cent, followed by Tunisia at 22.8 per cent and the United Arab Emirates at 22.5 per cent. That figure reached 27.6 per cent in Tunisia following June elections. For the first time ever, five members of the Kuwaiti Parliament were women.

51. Political parties — which were often the main route to political participation — should adopt temporary special measures to increase women's membership. A growing number of Arab countries, including Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon, had also introduced quotas to encourage women's participation in local elections.

52. Turning to Goal 5 on the improvement of maternal health, she said that the period 1990-2005 had witnessed an overall increase in life expectancy and a drop in fertility in the ESCWA region. Maternal mortality ratios in the region, with the exception of Yemen and Sudan, were estimated to be lower than the world average of 400 deaths per 100,000 live births. Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates had achieved the goal of a 75 per cent or greater reduction in maternal mortality, and in almost all ESCWA countries, the number of births attended by skilled health personnel had increased.

53. In conclusion, she said that despite significant progress in the Arab region, the needs and status of women and girls were still accorded low priority, especially in the least developed countries. Adequate legislation, the integration of a gender perspective in all national policies, enabling machinery and the allocation of sufficient resources were crucial to ensuring that efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals were gender-sensitive.

54. In the area of education, the region's Governments needed to raise the minimum marriage age to improve the school retention rates for girls, particularly at the secondary level; overhaul curricula in order to eliminate discriminatory images and stereotypes; provide a supportive infrastructure (transportation, telecommunications, electricity and water supply) to reduce domestic workload; and launch regional initiatives and financing mechanisms, such as stipends, targeted vouchers and bursaries, to increase the enrolment of poor children in school.

55. To promote women's political participation, Governments which had not yet done so should introduce special temporary measures, such as quota systems, to increase women's representation in national parliaments and at the local level and support training for women in leadership skills, and in practical skills such as campaigning.

56. **Ms. Morales** (Peru) noted that ECLAC initiatives such as the Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean had been highly successful and had helped to increase women's participation in political life and decision-making. Nonetheless, huge disparities persisted, not only between men and women, but also between urban women and rural and indigenous women in the areas of health, education and employment.

57. Education was the key to narrowing those gaps. Peru had adopted an Act on Equal Education for Girls, Boys and Adolescents in Rural Areas and an Act on Intercultural Bilingual Education for Indigenous Peoples. The Ministry of Education was also implementing programmes and projects to guarantee quality education for all. Nonetheless, men and women did not have equal access to education, and there were disparities between the rural and urban areas as well.

58. Wage gaps between men and women were another continuing concern. Particularly at a time of financial crisis, efforts must be made to integrate women into the job market, facilitate their access to credit and microcredit and build their entrepreneurial skills. Peru offered women microenterprise loans and provided training in business skills.

59. Countries seeking to provide equal opportunities for men and women could benefit from exchanges of experience and international cooperation. She wished to ask the Deputy Executive Secretary of ECLAC how the countries of that region could strengthen South-South cooperation mechanisms for the purpose of achieving gender equality.

60. **Mr. Rosenthal** (Guatemala) expressed appreciation for the work of all the regional commissions and in particular, the support that ECLAC had long provided to the Latin American and Caribbean region. He urged the Council to accord the dialogue with the Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions its proper place in the agenda of future sessions, allowing sufficient time for a meaningful exchange between the Executive Secretaries and the intergovernmental machinery.

61. **Mr. Kubiš** (Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)), supported the proposal made by the representative of Guatemala, echoing his call for a genuine and in-depth dialogue.

62. **Mr. Al-Seedi** (Iraq) said that, under the Iraqi Constitution, 25 per cent representatives in Parliament must be women, and that, in all walks of life, Iraqi women were represented at executive and decision-making levels, including as ministers and deputy ministers.

63. **Mr. Bidounga** (Congo) expressed concern at the figures cited by the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa regarding the region's prospects for attaining the Millennium Development Goals. Like other African countries emerging from conflict, the Congo faced a number of obstacles to meeting the Millennium Development Goals and was dependent on global partnerships and assistance from the international community in order to achieve them. Having reached the completion point under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC) during the current year, it had managed to reduce its foreign debt stock significantly; however, it had received next to no Official Development Assistance (ODA), had no national aid policy in place and had not acceded to the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness until 2009. Despite its oil resources, it was a middle-income country with no fixed parity between its currency and the euro, and it faced difficulties in attracting the kind of foreign aid and investment that would help it to diversify its economy

64. As the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals drew near, his country continued to wrestle with obstacles to achieving the MDGs. Referring to Goal 1 on poverty

eradication, he said that despite an economic upturn, 70 per cent of the Congolese people were still living at the poverty line in the aftermath of the conflict there. With regard to Goal 2 on access to primary education, he said that the destruction of infrastructure during the conflict had affected school enrolment.

65. As for Goal 3 on gender equality and empowerment of women, social constraints persisted in the Congo, despite a strengthened legal framework, the work of civil society organizations for the advancement of women and the multifaceted support of development partners. The adoption of a national gender policy in 2008 had been a major stride.

66. With the aim of reducing maternal and child mortality (Goal 5), Congolese authorities had made every effort to reconstruct health centres destroyed in the conflict; to make medicines, including antiretroviral treatment and insecticide-treated mosquito nets, available to the population at low cost or free of charge; and to provide special protection to children under 15 years of age and pregnant women.

67. In the past decade, his Government had devoted significant attention to ensuring environmental sustainability (Goal 7) in view of the Congo's special place in the global ecosystem, but with limited success, as its institutional framework was not capable of integrated management of environmental issues. However, Government initiatives to disseminate information on biodiversity and climate change had raised national actors' awareness of the principle of sustainable development.

68. **Mr. Yakovenko** (Russian Federation) said that the Russian Federation attached great importance to the activity of the regional economic commissions and supported a further strengthening of their coordinating role and active use of their experience in preparing global strategies for economic and social development, including on gender issues.

69. As the commissions had regulatory, advisory and operational functions, they were the best adapted to specific regional conditions and therefore had unique opportunities for helping countries to address their current national or international problems.

70. All of the work of the commissions was related directly or indirectly to enhancing women's role in society, while issues of development assistance and achievement of the MDGs continued to be of paramount importance. The intergovernmental nature of the regional commissions and the capacity of member countries to determine their priorities were a guarantee of the effectiveness of regional cooperation.

71. The Russian Federation was a member of two regional commissions, ECE and ESCAP, and provided them with political, expert and financial support, including an annual voluntary contribution of 1.2 billion dollars each. The Russian Federation was also considering participation in the work of ECA and ECLAC.

72. He commended the efforts of ECE and ESCAP to develop transport and infrastructure, which were important tools for stimulating economic growth, trade development and the strengthening of regional integration.

73. The regional commissions played a special role in coordination on traffic safety issues, as recognized in General Assembly resolution 64/255. The work of the regional commissions on energy was also very important, as energy security and effectiveness were currently the key factors in providing sustainable and dynamic growth in the global economy. The regional commissions shared their experiences and transferred energy-saving technologies and took part in intergovernmental efforts to harmonize the regulatory and legal basis of energy security. In conclusion, the Russian Federation would provide the regional commissions with all possible assistance to further increase the effectiveness of their activities.

74. **Mr. Herawan** (Observer for Indonesia) said that his country was well on track to meet Goal 3, which, it believed, also carried a responsibility to guarantee women a healthy and safe environment at home and at work and equal opportunities in the labour market. Urging the international community to support countries' efforts to achieve Goal 5 on improving maternal health, he said that his delegation welcomed the Secretary-General's Joint Action Plan for Women's and Children's Health. In anticipation of the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly to review the Millennium Development Goals, Indonesia would be hosting a Special Ministerial Meeting for MDG Review for Asian and Pacific countries in Jakarta on 3 and 4 August.

75. **Ms. Herd** (National Right to Life Educational Trust Fund) said that, as a registered obstetric nurse with over 44 years of experience, she felt strongly that

unless Goal 5 on maternal health was fulfilled, all the other Millennium Development Goals would be out of reach and the world would be no better off than it had been 10 years earlier when the Goals were first conceived.

76. It was difficult to understand why women in the developing world had not been provided the proper health care when the medical community had known for 70 years how to save their lives and, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), 87 per cent of maternal deaths were preventable. Although maternal mortality rates had decreased since the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo, they were still unacceptably high.

77. The international community seemed more concerned about decreasing the birth rate than making delivery safe, but women could never be empowered or enjoy gender equality if they were dead.

78. **Ms. Brichta** (Brazil) said that in the year marking the fifteenth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Inter-American Year of Women, her Government would be hosting the eleventh session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean. From 13 to 16 July, some 800 women from all over the region would be meeting in Brasília to take stock of the progress achieved since the adoption of the Quito Consensus, and to identify common strategies for addressing bottlenecks in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Conference would focus on the economic empowerment of women and women in situations of natural disaster, relief and reconstruction, particularly in Haiti and Chile.

79. **Mr. Tommo Monthe** (Cameroon) reassured the Executive Secretaries that the Council attached great importance to engaging in a genuine dialogue with them, and suggested that they might also work with the Council more closely through the Committee for Programme and Coordination, which met regularly with the regional commissions in its detailed consideration of their programmes and subprogrammes. He expressed support for the observation by the representative of Guatemala regarding the effectiveness of the dialogue and for his request that it be assigned its proper place in the Council's programme of work. General Assembly resolution 32/197 establishing that the regional commissions should be the main general economic and social development centres with the United Nations system for their respective regions remained valid.

80. Expressing concern at the statistics cited by Mr. Janneh in his presentation and in his "Repositioning Africa" exercise, he asked how efforts to achieve the MDGs in Africa could be redoubled beyond the many initiatives already taken, particularly within the context of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

81. **Ms. Renford** (Observer for Israel) said that Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation (*Mashav*) was engaged in a joint project with the Economic Commission for Europe and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) to foster women's entrepreneurship in Central Asia and the Caucasus region within the framework of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) region. The project was a tool for the empowerment of women and was helping to create jobs and economic opportunities for them.

82. As a partner in the Young Americas Business Trust supported by the Organization of American States (OAS), Israel conducted "business labs" that had provided training to 22,000 persons from 29 countries in the Latin American and Caribbean region, including youth and indigenous women. Israel looked forward to strengthening its cooperation with those organizations and other stakeholders in order to address challenges to achieving gender equality and the Millennium Development Goals.

83. **Mr. Janneh** (Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)) expressed strong support for the proposal put forward by the representative of Guatemala and supported by Cameroon concerning the place of the dialogue in the Council's agenda. The statistics he had presented did indeed look bleak, but only if current trends continued, and he was hoping they would not.

84. He welcomed initiatives by the Congo and other African countries to draft MDG-based poverty reduction strategy papers and national development strategies, which were already bearing fruit. Prior to the global economic crisis, Africa had been hoping to increase its growth rate to at least 7 or 8 per cent. While it remained ambitious and was continuing its efforts to plan effectively and manage its development

resources, it needed additional support to keep up that momentum. In that connection, he welcomed the G-8 and G-20 dialogue with Africa during the Toronto Summit, held in June, and the pledge of $5 billion in assistance for maternal child health.

85. In conclusion, he said that NEPAD was still a very credible programme and was reorganizing in line with Africa's determination to scale up development efforts and make significant progress towards achieving the MDGs.

86. **Ms. Heyzer** (Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)), thanked Indonesia for its active participation in ESCAP and for co-hosting a major meeting on infrastructure development earlier in the year. In August, the region's ministerial meeting to review progress in achieving the MDGs would be held in Jakarta. She also wished to thank the Russian Federation for supporting the work of ESCAP in the areas of transport, energy and statistics. Its assistance with regard to intermodal transport was especially critical for the landlocked developing countries and least developed countries.

87. Turning to the question on maternal health, she said that not all women in the developing world were dying after delivery. Those who suffered that fate were mainly poor women in rural and remote areas because of a lack of investment in rural infrastructure and health-care systems and the undervaluation of women and girls. Putting that issue on the political agenda was critical to moving forward.

88. She echoed support for the comments by the representative of Guatemala and other delegations, highlighting the coordination function of the regional commissions in bringing together the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and the unique perspective that came of looking at global issues through a regional prism. The regional commissions also had greater capacity to interface with subregional organizations and in many instances, regional cooperation could help to accelerate development at the country level. For example, ESCAP identified countries on track to achieve the MDGs and those that were not; it also analysed development disparities within on-track countries and encouraged communities that had made progress to assist those that were lagging behind. She therefore welcomed the Council's new emphasis on regional commissions.

89. **Mr. Prado** (Deputy Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)), responding to the representative of Peru, said that effective cooperation required knowledge, political will, resources and sound policies capable of changing the situation in the region. All ECLAC divisions, particularly its Division for Gender Affairs had channelled their knowledge into the creation of the Gender Equality Observatory.

90. As for political will, the forthcoming Conference in Brasilia would provide an occasion for States to affirm their commitment to reducing gender gaps in the region and to contributing adequate resources to that end.

91. **Ms. Omer** (Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)), praised Iraq for rising above its situation to make significant accomplishments. Iraq continued to lead in the representation of women in Parliament.

92. As for the need to make conscious choices to reduce maternal mortality, she said that results could be achieved in a short time if adequate resources were committed to it and if it was viewed as a priority. In the majority of the States members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, for example, the maternal mortality rate was now close to zero.

93. **Mr. Kubiš** (Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Europe), moderator, thanked all participants in the dialogue — the Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions as well as Council members and observers. Many of the points raised had broad relevance beyond the work of any specific regional commission.

94. The statement by the representative of the Russian Federation had highlighted the need to create a better platform for ongoing interaction with delegations in New York on issues of interest, such as energy. He also wished to thank the representative of Israel for describing concrete initiatives, including a joint project with his own regional commission.

95. The five regional commissions appreciated the comments and guidance of Council members and very much valued the opportunity to hold a dialogue with them. Since they were the ones on the ground and the face of the United Nations to the people, they would be grateful for a longer exchange with the Council and a more prominent place in its agenda.

The meeting rose at 5.40 p.m.